

Congressman Seeks to Identify Hundreds of Argentine Children Born In Captivity & Taken Away From Biological Mothers

Washington, DC - The U.S. House of Representatives today approved a provision authored by Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) that would compel the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to report to Congress on any information the U.S. intelligence community has about the human rights violations of the military government in Argentina from the mid-1970's to mid-1980's. The measure also calls for information to be revealed about that government's rise to power and the location and true identity of Argentine children born in captivity during that period who were taken away from their biological mothers.

Given the close relationship with their Argentine counterparts in the intelligence, security, and military community, it's believed that the American intelligence community is likely to have invaluable information to support ongoing justice investigations and the search for the children born in captivity. Hinchey's measure was included as part of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011.

During the 1970's and 1980's, approximately 500 Argentine women were abducted by Argentine security forces and their children, some of whom were conceived through rapes by those security force members, were born into captivity. Those children were then given to members of the Argentine security forces while the mothers are believed to have been killed. The identity of nearly 100 of those children has been discovered, but the whereabouts of the majority of them remains unknown. Hinchey's amendment seeks to shed light on the unknown fate of these children, who would be in their 20's and early 30's today.

"By passing this measure today, Congress is helping to lift the veil of secrecy surrounding the terrible human rights abuses committed by the despotic Argentinean regime of the 1970's and 1980's and helping to bring truth and justice to what was a horrific period in South America," Hinchey said. "Tragically, hundreds of Argentine citizens have no idea about their true identity. While the current Argentine government wants to shed light on these past atrocities and help reconnect these children with their biological families, it needs the assistance of the U.S. intelligence community. This amendment will finally require the Director of National Intelligence to provide the relevant information that the intelligence community has regarding this dark period in Argentina so that the truth can finally be known."

Argentina's Ambassador to the U.S., Héctor Timerman, said, "The Hinchey amendment adopted today is a very important tool in the search for the truth of what happened in Argentina during the period of the last military dictatorship. During those years thousands of people were persecuted, tortured and killed. Around 500 children of these victims were taken by the murderers of their parents of whom so far only a hundred of them now adults, have recovered their true identity. The Hinchey amendment will open the archives, which will enable the continued search for data that will allow us to find them and reunite them with their real families. The affirmative vote of the Representatives is an important gesture of solidarity with all victims of the dictatorship in Argentina and also a strong demonstration of a commitment to defend human rights by the American people and the institutions that represent them."

In 1976, amidst social unrest and a deep political crisis in Argentina, a military coup installed an extraordinarily cruel dictatorship. Illegal detentions, torture and summary executions of dissidents became routine. Cross country operations to capture and assassinate dissidents were organized by Argentina in cooperation with Southern Cone military regimes in what was known as Operation Condor. Over the years, as the victims of the repression increasingly went missing, a new tactic of the Argentine security forces was revealed. It is estimated that nearly 30,000 people disappeared in Argentina between 1976 and 1985. Many of these victims, known as "the disappeared" or "los desaparecidos," were abducted, tortured, and then dropped far out into the ocean.

Hinchey offered a very similar provision in the 110th Congress to the Intelligence Authorization bill, which the House approved. However, the measure was never taken up by the Senate, which is why the congressman needed to offer it again this year. Hinchey's measure is supported by the Argentine government, the National Security Archive of George Washington University, and various human rights organizations.

This is not the first time Hinchey has sought to make public the role and knowledge of U.S. intelligence agencies pertaining to human rights abuses in Latin America. In 1999, Hinchey succeeded in passing legislation that required the CIA to report to Congress on its involvement in the 1973 coup of Chile's democratically elected President, Salvador Allende. Following the coup, President Allende was assassinated and General Augusto Pinochet began his 17-year dictatorship. The report, now known as the Hinchey Report, makes a clear case that the United States - at the very highest levels of our government - was deeply involved in the destabilization of Chile's government and economy over a period of nearly twenty years. The Hinchey Report revealed that, beginning in the early 1960's and continuing through the late 1970's, the U.S. funneled millions of dollars to opposition groups to prevent the rise to power of the Chilean left. The CIA admitted its participation in an unsuccessful 1970 plot to prevent President Allende from taking office and its knowledge of the 1973 coup that led to Allende's death and the rise of Pinochet.

